

Influence of Policy Instruction and Training on Use of Deadly Force by Police

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Abstract: Use of force by police are gaining deserved attention and scrutiny. Citizens wonder if police use of force is always proportional and necessary. Even though police organizations routinely train officers on proper use of force, how can the public know if use of force policies and training procedures adequately address use of force? With this manuscript, a longitudinal examination of policy instruction on use of deadly force by police begins. Two central questions endured: how do retired officers perceive the effectiveness of deadly force training and how do retired officers perceive training on critical thinking and discretion? Through the course of interviews with retired officers, themes such as, enhanced training, critical thinking development, and proper use of discretion appeared. These areas emerged as most important in avoiding improper use of deadly force by police. We conclude that reality-based training, evidence-based critical thinking skills, and development of proper discretion are advised to maximize proper use of force by police and gain citizens' confidence that force used is defensible and supportable.

Keywords: Police, Use of force, Police policy, Police training and instruction

Introduction

Police officers have the daunting task to maintain order and to protect the public. The 21st century police officer has a harder and more complex task to perform than that of the officer from 40 years ago. The public is not as supportive as they were decades ago, and the modern police officer must deal with constant negative media coverage. We read about the mistakes police officers make, but rarely hear about all the good police do. Two examples of police bravery and selfless heroism are related below.

In November of 1998, Illinois State Trooper (ISP) Neal Merry was on patrol on Route 94, North of Carthage Illinois. He received a call from telecommunications of a pickup truck, overturned in a deep, raging creek. A young woman had lost control on the icy roadway and the truck went off the road, overturned, and came to rest top down in a deep creek that had very fast flowing water making it impossible for the young woman to escape the vehicle. When Trooper Merry arrived at the scene, he dove in the water, climbed on to the truck, pried open the door, and pulled her to safety on top of the overturned truck. Shortly after the rescue, fire department and hospital crews arrived and helped Trooper Merry get the victim into an ambulance. The young woman and Trooper Merry were treated for hypothermia and released from the hospital. Trooper Merry earned an Illinois State Police Medal of Valor for his rescue of the young woman. Nothing was reported in the news media.

In April of 2008, Trooper Todd Adkisson responded to a car crash on Route 67 North of Macomb, Illinois. When Trooper Adkisson arrived at the scene of the crash, the car was on its top, it was on fire, and there was a young man trapped in the car. Two other passengers had safely escaped from the vehicle. Without hesitation, Trooper Adkisson tried to pry open the door of the car to no avail. He broke out the rear passenger side window. The victim's shoes had melted to the floorboard making it difficult to pull the victim to safety. Eventually, Trooper Adkisson was able to pull the young man from the car. The victim's clothes were on fire and fearing possible spinal trauma, Trooper could not roll the victim to put out the fire. Instead, he used a coat and his hands to smother the fire. The young burn victim was suffering from massive third degree burns and was air lifted for treatment at a burn unit. Trooper Adkisson received second and third degree burns on his hands and wrists. He was off duty for three weeks recuperating from his injuries. The young man who was rescued survived the incident, went through multiple surgeries to help heal his wounds, and is alive and healthy today because of the heroic efforts of Trooper Adkisson. For his courage and selfless actions, Trooper Adkisson was awarded the Illinois State Police Medal of Valor, the Governor's Medal of Honor, and was named the International Association of Chiefs of Police 2008 National North Region Trooper of the Year at a special ceremony in Washington, DC. Nothing was reported in the media.

The two ISP Troopers have subsequently retired from the Illinois State Police and their efforts are simply examples of the many thousands of positive actions the police do every day. Unfortunately, the media does not see these heroic deeds as worthy of reporting. However, the media bombards the public with any inclining of something negative occurring in police work.

In some cases, the incidents definitively need to be publicized so that these incidents never occur again. Incidents like the one where in April of 2015, South Carolina Officer Michael Slager pulled over 50-year old Walter Scott for a broken taillight and Scott tried to run away from Slager because there were family court issued warrants for Scott (Campbell, 2015). Scott tried to push away from Officer Slager, the officer used a Taser on Scott, Scott pulled the Taser from the grasp of Slager, and as Scott walked away from the officer, Slager shot Scott in the back multiple times (Campbell, 2015). Officer Slager was charged with murder and has been fired from the police agency (Campbell, 2015). It was abuse of power like this that the public has the right to question and demand

justice. This case represents a glaring abuse of police authority and a goal of this study is to help better prepare police officers for deadly force encounters.

The problem discussed in this study was the training that ISP troopers receive may not be perceived as adequate because it does not include critical thinking and the use of discretion (Morrison & Garner, 2011). Without practical application experience within the context of the training, training may not be optimal (Thomasson et al., 2014). Not to mention, research related to use of deadly force by the police is not a new phenomenon, but historically there has been no systematic data collection effort by governmental agencies related to police use of force (Matusiak, Cavanaugh and Stephanson, 2022). The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to explore retired Illinois State Police (ISP) Troopers perceptions of the inclusion of critical thinking and use of discretion in their deadly force policy training (Sekhon, 2011). Two central questions guided this study:

RQ1: How do retired ISP Troopers perceive the effectiveness of their deadly force training in preparing them for shoot or do not shoot training?

RQ 2: How do retired ISP troopers feel that their training adequately includes the application of critical thinking and the use of discretion?

Additionally, it's often understood that good examinations of police tactics and techniques should include

- (a) real-life data and information such as the number of incidents in which police officers discharge firearms at citizens;
- (b) the demographic characteristics of the officers and citizens involved in each incident;
- (c) the agency/agencies employing the involved officers and location of each incident;
- (d) the particular weapon(s) used by police and citizens; and
- (e) the injuries, if any, suffered by officers and citizens (Matusiak, Cavanaugh and Stephanson, 2022).

That is another highly useful element of this particular study.

Central to the study is the critical thinking element of policing (Makin, 2016; Phillips & Burrell, 2009). For this study, critical thinking can be viewed as reasoned thinking with a purpose. In this study the purpose is the police use of reasoned thinking to best deal with deadly force encounters (Helsdingen, van Gog, & van Merrienboer, 2011). The lived experiences of Illinois State Police officers who have been trained in the use of deadly force and have had experience with applying the deadly force policy were willing to tell their stories. The participants are retired troopers of the Illinois State Police. The findings from the retired police interviews provided insights into the effectiveness of their policy training programs. The value of the study findings has resulted to informing the department of the findings to foster reviewing ISP police deadly force training for effectiveness of the policy training curriculum. Research conducted still support the theme of this study that critical thinking is indeed an integral part of police decision making (Isaza, McManus, Engel, & Corsaro, 2019. Riddlehoover, 2020).

What's more, a contemporary research study examined what police officers experience during incidents, of stress primarily on perception and memory, and post-incident experiences. Apart from basic reviews on the effects of stress (such as officer involved shooting - OIS) on perception, memory and decision-making during OIS, most

research studies lack the detail or data to drive tactical, training, equipment and even future legislation change (Petersson, Bertilsson, Fredriksson, Magnusson, and Fransson, 2017). Yet, again, while this was another highly useful element addressed in this study some of today's police instructors believe police training may be broken and needs to be updated, like the first study called for (Preston, 2020). In her article Caroline Preston advised that the training of law enforcement needs to start at the college level and that the college instructors need to take responsibility for what they teach future public servants (Preston, 2020). This is a stand that Daugherty, Bitner, and Ekici heartily endorse and respect. The Chancellor of California's community college system related, "Colleges need to "take personal responsibility and personal accountability. We cannot sit here as educators and say the problem is somewhere else. If the college system determines that any police academies are not committed to making needed changes to their approach and curricula, he said, "then we need to sever that relationship (Preston, 2020)." In other words, police academies, colleges, and the police educators need to take responsibility and reform how police are educated and trained so that there is never again an incident where George Floyd is trapped and tortured under the knee of a police officer (Preston, 2020).

Further, this literature review revealed that there is a vast amount of literature on studies about deadly force in law enforcement, but little on the effects of education, instruction, and training on deadly force. The literature review included peer reviewed journal articles on deadly force from a variety of stakeholders' perspectives including police instructors, police training policy administrators, and the effects of the policies and training on police officers. When research was conducted to update the information regarding the effects of deadly force education and training on the use of deadly force, there was still little research articles on the subject. One 2020 article however, did support this papers findings that deadly force training needs to be taken seriously and police need to better prepare on when to use deadly force (Dima, 2020). According to professional police instructor Darryl Rivers, "Everyone leans to [being] overly passive now because no one wants to use force nowadays and the citizens know that. That is a major problem. I know officers that absolutely love their job, but they're scared to do it now (Dima, 2020)." Thus, it would appear that Rivers is opening a door for additional studies examining on whether or not fear of using deadly force is endangering modern police officers.

Additionally, publications by experts on deadly force examinations, popular press publications, and credible internet resources were also subjected to review. This research provided information on what problems confront police employees when faced with deadly force training, education, instruction, and police issues. The literature review provided insights into how deadly force management affects morale, production, public reactions, and organizational success.

The operational definition of deadly force is that force which is likely to cause death or great bodily harm (ILETSB, 2011b). Controlling how police officers are properly trained to deal with deadly force encounters is the responsibility of the curriculum writers and police supervision. The essential need for ascertaining that training is effective is supported by statistical data involving deadly force issues. In one quantitative study, the data collected showed that 91.5% of officers were killed by firearms (Charles & Copay, 2002). In another quantitative study,

65% of the officers' shots missed the intended target (Charles & Copay, 2002). When officers draw their weapons, they often miss their target more frequently than they hit it when in deadly force encounters. The need for effective training is highlighted when situations like this occur (Charles & Copay, 2002).

Perhaps, by embracing uncomfortable but necessary conversations around police training and how police training & service systems have developed or evolved to either support or fail individual officers can result in improved outcomes for its citizens in need of support. By reframing gaps in training as a police and service to community issue, instead of just a mandated government system, the human services side of policing may create better outcomes for all (Morfoot & Pollack).

In fact, a recent study, using real people to role play in police training situations found this training style to be superior in improving stress management, tactical shooting performance, and training effectiveness. The study concludes that real-life training scenarios that closely mimic high stress situations can significantly improve police perceptions of physiological and psychological stress leading to safer productive outcomes (Liu, Mao, Zhao, and Huang).

Methodology

A qualitative exploratory study was used for this research on how officers feel about their deadly force policy training. This case study approach provides police officers the opportunity to discuss how deadly force training pertains to the everyday functions of police work. The case study method was used because it provides for a process of research whereby there is an intense analysis of a person or community. The developmental factors of the person or community in relation to their environment can be defined but not numerically analyzed (Gerring, 2004). This study is an exploration of the question of whether more training can help officers better prepare for deadly force issues.

Over a 33 year-span of the career in law enforcement, the lead interviewer for the study was involved in educational leadership and formed distinct opinions on what constitutes effective training. The challenge was to decide on a research methodology that would remove as much of the researcher bias as possible. Computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) like NVivo 10 were designed to assist researchers in data storage and analysis, research management, and theory development (Gibbs, Friese, & Mangaberia, 2002).

To control for bias in interpreting participants' responses, the interviews were tape recorded and member checking followed to clarify and verify the exact words of the respondents (Kellett, 2005; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The words and phrases were then entered into the NVivo 10 software which was used to identify and analyze the major themes in the remaining interviewee Word documents (Baugh, Hallcom, & Harris, 2010). By entering exactly what the respondents said into NVivo 10, a researcher's opinions will not influence the data gathered (Bourbon, 2002; Crowley, Harre, & Tagg, 2002; Welsh 2002).

The study samples were drawn from retired troopers of the Illinois State Police Department. The Illinois State Police Department consists of 21 districts and one administrative district (ISP, 2013). As of 2013, the ISP has over 3,000 employees with 1,781 being sworn troopers (USDOJ, 2013). The ISP demographic composition consists of 91% male, 9% female, 80% white, 13% African-American, 6% Hispanic, and 1% Asian (LEMAS, 2000). There are also 1,424 retired Illinois State Police officers who belong to the ISP Fraternal Order of Police Lodge 41 and these retired officers were solicited for participants for this study (ISPFOP, 2016).

The samples for interviews were solicited from the members of the retired Illinois State Police (ISP) Troopers. The study samples included both male and female, varied ethnicities and age groups. The samples consisted of retired troopers that include representatives who had served in multiple districts of the ISP. The sample size of the participants at the beginning of the study was anticipated to be 20 to 30. However, saturation of data was achieved at 22 participant interviews which provided the necessary data for the study. Retired officers were selected from those who had retired 10 years or less.

Confidentiality in this research is based on contemporary ethics codes that provide guidance against unethical experimentation, that participant inclusion in a study is voluntary, and that their identities are protected (Perlman, 2004). Confidentiality is very important because the researcher in any study has an obligation to protect the participant's privacy, their anonymity, and to eliminate any information in the study publication that may lead to a deductive disclosure of the participant's identity (Cohen, Mannion, & Morrison, 2011; Kaiser, 2009). To ensure the confidentiality of the participants contact between the researcher and the participant was by telephone or in person at a location chosen by the participant. Voluntary participation, responsible information, and the competence of the researcher are the key elements for ensuring that the participants provide honest responses (Lambert & Glaken, 2011).

It is essential that the willing participant in any study is completely apprised of all information pertaining to their part in a study and they must be told if there are any risks involved in their participation (Lambert & Glaken, 2011). Each participant was presented with the University Informed Consent form to review and sign if they wish to participate in the study. The informed consent forms include the explanations that the participant must understand the nature of the study and that he or she must be 18 years or older to participate and they must not be a member of a protected class. The age requirement is very easy to accommodate because the retired Illinois State Troopers were 50 years of age or older. The participants were advised the participation is voluntary and they could withdraw from the study anytime they may so choose.

The data collection instrument includes both the interviewer and interviewee. When the researcher is a human, and not a data collection instrument, complex situations can be more deeply comprehended (Barrett, 2007; Lave & Kvale, 1995). Social research benefits from the interaction between the researcher and the individuals being studied and the researcher can comprehend the important aspects of human life (Burgess, 1984; McCracken, 1988).

Table 1. Participant Demographics for the Study

Demographic Characteristics		Participant	Total Participants	%
Gender	Male	20	22	91
	Female	2		9
Age	50-55	10	22	45
	56-61	9		41
	61-65	3	22	14
Race	White/Caucasian	22	22	100
Worked 1 District Entire Career		12	22	55
Worked More Than 1 District Entire Career		10	22	45
How Long Retired	1-5 Years	15	22	68
	6-10 Years	7	22	32
Use of Deadly Force by Participants		Number of Participants		%
Never Used Deadly Force During Their Career		20		90
Used Deadly Force During Their Career		2		10

The two research questions and the corresponding interview questions were:

RQ1: How do retired ISP Troopers describe the effectiveness of their deadly force training?

1. How recent was your last training session on deadly force?
2. How well was the current policy explained?
3. How well did you know the policy before the training?
4. How well did you actually understand the policy?
5. To what degree did your training prepare you for the actual use of deadly force?
6. To what degree did your training discuss using a weapon?
7. Have you ever been through a scenario or event where you had to apply the deadly force policy?
 - a. How effective was the scenario of event?
 - b. Did it change how you prepared for such an event?

- c. How much discretion was involved in the event?
8. How effective is the current training on deadly force?
- | | | |
|----------------------|--------------------|------------|
| Very Effective | Somewhat effective | Neutral |
| Somewhat ineffective | Very ineffective | No opinion |

RQ 2: How do retired ISP troopers feel that their training adequately includes the application of critical thinking and the use of discretion?

1. How did your training help you in developing the critical thinking skills for deadly force application?
2. To what extent did your training include a discussion on the role of discretion?
3. How did your training help you in understanding the role of discretion in shoot/don't shoot situations?
4. How much discretion do you have to decide whether to use deadly force?
5. To what degree did your training prepare you for the actual use of deadly force?
6. How would you improve the training on deadly force?

The data gathered through the research was imported directly into Nvivo from a word processing package and then the data was coded on screen (Welsh, 2002). The coding stripes were visible on screen and the researcher was able to write memos concerning particular aspects of the data to link the pieces from different data documents loaded into the NVivo (Welsh, 2002). This data was be collated using the NVivo 10 software that organizes the data into a priority order of recurring themes. The interviews were transcribed into Word documents using a software application such as Dragon Dictate. Dragon Dictation software was used by the researcher by speaking into a microphone and playing the recorded tape into the microphone, and the Dragon Dictation transcribed the speech into a word document (Matthews, 2011). The Word documents were uploaded into NVivo 10 where they were analyzed for common themes.

In qualitative studies, to ensure that the guidelines of validity and reliability are achieved, the concepts of credibility, dependability, conformability, and transferability are applied to the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Denzin & Lincoln, 2012; Lincoln & Guba, 1985, 1994; Moustakas 1994). Credibility in this study was achieved by continuous collaboration with the participants to ensure that their recorded responses are completely accurate. Bracketing was used in this study to ensure that dependability is achieved. Bracketing involves putting aside one's own belief in and what is personally known about a phenomenon being investigated along with open-ended questions to ensure the participants provide their views, not the researcher's (Carpenter, 2007; Zenobi, Yuen-ling, & Wai-tong, 2013). Member checking was employed to strengthen validity by clarifying and verifying the exact wording of the participants which also helped to establish credibility.

The best way to achieve conformability is for the researcher to have a system of comprehensive record keeping and data preservation for potential scrutiny at a later time (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The audit train suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1994) calls for the machinery for broad assessment of the research conduct by preserving

records throughout the research process. A concise and regulated audit and record keeping process was used to preserve all data collected so further scrutiny of the data can be achieved at any time.

The element of transferability can be established when the study results can be generalized, used, or replicated to other conditions, populations, or situations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Transferability can be achieved because the data results from this research study will be able to be applied to any police agency administrator who wishes to determine if their personnel are satisfied with the deadly force training that they are receiving. The administrator can easily transfer the methodology of this study and modify it to their needs and conduct their own study.

Analysis and Presentation of Data

Content analysis included analyzing the data for elements related to training effectiveness and deadly force preparation. The first step was to make a list of all the words and phrases that applied to training needs and were related to the two research questions. The raw data, when analyzed produced a list 57 words and phrases which were then further analyzed for similar meaning and interpretation. The words in the list were then combined for similarities and reduced to a smaller list of 30 words. The second list was then reduced to 18 words and phrases which then became the query for NVivo.

The final list was entered into a query in NVivo software where further analysis was performed. The transcripts of the participants' responses from the interview questions were fed into the NVivo 10 qualitative analysis software. When the query of words and phrases were applied to the documents, four dominant themes, or nodes, were derived. The following are the four emergent themes.

Theme 1: Reality Based Training Needed

All 22 participants reported the need for more reality-based training. Any training that required analysis of a situation, movement, reaction time, real life concepts that challenged the mind and the body were identified as training that could better prepare them for deadly force encounters. This reality-based training included active shooter training where the troopers went into a building and role played like it was an actual event. Role players were either troopers or offenders and both sets of role players reacted to situations that were presented. The active shooter training scenarios mirrored what the officers would face if they were to encounter an actual active shooter in a school or on patrol. One participant mentioned that such scenarios provided the officers with an example of what was happening in society at any given time. The additional research conducted after the publication of the first article revealed that reality-based training is still viewed as necessary by several newer studies. Additionally training time must be more effectively used and focused on. In other words, police training time must be used as effectively as is humanly possible (Cushion, 2020; Staller, Koerner, Heil, Klemmer, Abraham, & Poolton, 2021).

Theme 2: Critical Thinking Training

Fourteen of the participants believed that the training they received in their careers to a certain degree helped to increase the critical thinking skills necessary to make sound decisions in deadly force encounters. Four believed that the ISP training only provided minimal training regarding the development of critical thinking. The consensus of the 14 retired troopers was they felt that the training helped them to develop the critical thinking skills to apply policy and the law to determine the proper course of action in deadly force encounters but indicated that critical thinking could be emphasized in more depth. The remaining participants believed that the training focused very little if any on critical thinking development. Six participants related that there was no critical thinking application involved in the training. One participant advised that the department should be more focused on liability issues. Lastly, two participants revealed that they believed that they did not learn how to apply critical thinking skills to policy interpretation at all during training; but they acquired critical thinking skills through on the job experience.

Additional research on this theme for the original study revealed that the critical thinking is indeed a popular research topic for many researchers concerned with police professionalism. According to one researcher, “Officers’ response times in such a situation directly relate to how quickly they can sort through a sea of stimuli during a lethal encounter. The subsequent reaction depends upon their observation and decision-making abilities. Although some choices must be made in an instant, others allow more time to think about the best course of action. In both cases, critical thinking is vital to the safety of both the officer and the community” (Ridlehoover, 2020).

Next, another article called for robust critical thinking into all law enforcement agencies so that all officers learn to think within multiple viewpoints; to improve their ability to reason fairly; to cultivate ethical virtues into their minds; to avoid faulty assumptions that lead to poor judgments; and to learn the barriers to critical thinking.” (TFFCT, 2020).

Theme 3: Policy Limits Discretion

Six participants believed that the training they received was thorough and incorporated meaningful discussions on discretion. The remaining 15 participants felt that the discussions on discretion did not exist in training, were very minimal, or were barely adequate. One participant related that he understood the role of discretion in critical incidents, but he felt that others in the training sessions were in the fog regarding discretion.

However, 16 of the 22 participants believed that the only limits on discretion are the law and policy. The consensus of these retired troopers was that it was left up to the individual on how to respond to a deadly force encounter and the only limitations were provided by the law and policy. Since no laws or policy can possibly give a definitive guide on how to respond to every possible situation, a police officer could ever encounter, the officers had the discretion to react as necessary provided they did not violate the guidelines of the law and policy. One participant related that he felt that policy was far more restrictive than the law regarding deadly force, but it was still left up

to the officer on how to handle a deadly force encounter because it was the officer making the second-by-second decisions in the field. Another participant however, believed that he had very little discretion when it came to deadly force application because he felt that the department discouraged the use of deadly force. He also believed when he was shot, he had no discretion because he had no other option but to use deadly force or he would have died.

One of the important elements that was still very valid since this first study was conducted was that police discretion is as important today as it was yesterday. There needs to be a clear-headed approach to police discretion; the advantages and disadvantages of police discretion need to be clearly understood; and the police need to be accountable for their use of discretion (McNally, 2020; Miller, 2020; Turner & Rowe, 2020).

Theme 4: Training Improvement Needed

Twelve participants, 54.5% would like to see more reality-based training incorporated into training. These participants believed the active shooter, FATS Machine, Sims training, should be used more than once or twice a year to be truly effective. Four participants wanted more repetition in the training sessions to ensure the trainees had achieved a good understanding when the training session was completed. Six participants related that part of each training session should include critical discussions on personal deadly force encounters or current event encounters across the nation.

Videos of shooting encounters by police officers could be viewed and the viewing officers could provide feedback on the positives and negatives on these encounters. This would help them to better understand ramifications of decisions made by officers and can help to increase their understanding of discretion in these encounters and help to develop their critical thinking abilities. Two participants simply desired the department to develop better instruction on critical thinking and discretion regarding deadly force encounters. They believed that there cannot be enough emphasis placed on critical thinking and discretion development.

Another refreshing element that has continued to emerge since this study was conducted is that reality-based training and police training needs to evolve. Reality based training will definitively better prepare the police officer better deal with deadly force decisions (Thorne, 2020). This training helps prepare officers to effectively deal with dangerous felons, people with schizophrenia, autism, suicidal ideation, and other dangerous individuals (Schmelzer, 2020).

Conclusions and Recommendations

It is difficult to express in words what an officer feels when confronted with a deadly force situation. Police officers, from day one of their careers, are trained to be in control, to be definitive change agents for public altercations and disagreements, and to direct social change (Peak, 2012). They must use their training, knowledge,

skill, creativity, empathy, and moral foundations to deal with whatever situation effectively, successfully is presented to them. Officers are trained to be problem solvers (Peak, 2012; Geller & Swanger, 1995).

The results from the four themes established the need for deadly force training that incorporated reality-based training, more focus on critical thinking development, more training and discussions on discretion, and that discretion for police officers was limited by the law and policy. The results also revealed that 20 out of 22 of the participants never had to use deadly force against an assailant. The findings of this research study can encourage law enforcement leaders and educators of the Illinois State Police to incorporate more discretionary, critical thinking, and reality-based training for their personnel. These findings can assist the police officers in making better decisions regarding the use of deadly force in the field.

Deadly force policies can give great direction for police, yet if it restricts an officer from accomplishing their job function, then the consequences can result in a negative outcome (Broome, 2011; Thompson & Dowling, 2001). However, it takes more than a good policy to aid police in effective decision making. It also takes a well written curriculum on deadly force instruction, proper classroom education on the policy, and many hours of hands-on training to accustom officers to the stresses of deadly force encounters (Cordner & Shain, 2011; Thomasson, Gorman, Lirgg, & Adams, 2014).

This study revealed that the participants believed that more reality-based training is needed to improve their responses to deadly force situations. Essentially practice makes perfect and though perfection is not attainable, the more the officers train the better prepared they become when they encounter deadly force encounters. Future studies could research how much training, how many hours, is needed to help officers to react to deadly force like it is second nature to them.

The participants also believe that more discretionary and critical thinking training is necessary to help them work through deadly force situational encounters with the best decision-making processes possible. For this study, critical thinking can be viewed as reasoned thinking with a purpose and the purpose in this study is the police use of reasoned thinking to best deal with deadly force encounters (Helsdingen, van Gog, & van Merrienboer, 2011). The more experience the officer has with using their critical thinking abilities to make the best discretionary decisions the better the outcomes for the deadly force decision making process.

Future research can focus how to best incorporate critical thinking and discretion into training. Is it best to train these skills in the classroom, is it best during situational scenarios, or is a combination of both best for the officers? This future research can be an attempt to ascertain how much additional training is necessary to best prepare officers to use these skills during deadly force encounters. Due to the vast variety of deadly force objects including knives, sticks, keys, pencil, bottles, cars, trucks and practically anything could be a weapon, police deadly force training should be updated at least quarterly.

Additionally, this study can be replicated by any law enforcement agency throughout the nation that wishes to improve the training of the department for the betterment of their officers. Each agency could modify the research to best fit the needs of the particular agency. Questions for these studies could be more structured to ascertain how to specifically improve areas of training that would benefit the unique training requirements of each particular department. The perceptions and feelings of their officers could also help the department administrators and educators to create better policies and curriculums for deadly force training.

Notes

This is an exploratory research manuscript, developed in part from a dissertation (Influence of Policy Instruction on Police Use of Deadly Force: Exploratory Study, 2016, University of Phoenix by current author Glenn Daugherty), and draws on modernistic policy research, program evaluation, and solution-based knowledge to begin a longitudinal examination and assess policy changes on use of deadly force by police.

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